



Discover the old university city of Salamanca



Flamenco dancer



Tapas and Spices for sale in a Spanish Market



SPAIN

One of Europe's most popular holiday destinations, Spain's rich culture and history attract just as many people as its famous sun-drenched beaches.

Banking Generally banks are open for business from 8.30 a.m. to 2.30 p.m. Monday to Saturday, except in the summer months when they are closed on Saturday. Some branches are open in the afternoon.

Climate and Clothing Spain's climate varies from temperate in the north to dry and hot in the south. The best months to visit are from April to October, although mid-summer (July to August) can be hot throughout the country except for the coastal regions.

We recommend lightweight to mediumweight clothing and a light waterproof jacket, according to season.

Currency On 1 January 2002, the EURO replaced the Spanish Peseta (ESP) as the official currency of Spain. The fixed conversion rate for the EURO is 166.386 ESP.

Electricity 220 volts AC, European round 2-pin plugs are used.

Food and Drink One of the best ways to sample Spanish food is to try tapas, or snacks, which are served at any time of the day in local bars. These range from cheese and olives to squid or meat delicacies and are priced accordingly. Many of the specialities of Spanish cuisine are based on seafood. One of the best-known dishes is paella, which can be prepared in many ways, based on meat or seafood.

Spain is essentially a wine-drinking country, the principal table wines are the riojas and valdepenas, named after the regions in which they are produced. Sherry is one of Spain's principal export products. Its English name is the anglicised version of the producing town Jerez. There are four main types of sherry: fino (very pale and very dry), amontillado (dry, richer in body and darker in colour), oloroso (medium, full-bodied, fragrant and golden) and dulce (sweet).

Language Castilian or Spanish is the nation's official language. However, the following languages are also official in their respective autonomous communities: Catalan, Galician, Basque and Valencian.

Mail Post Offices are usually open from 9.00 a.m. to 6.00 p.m. Monday to Friday. Some local variations may occur. Post Offices in larger towns have extended hours, and in main cities are open 24 hours all year round. Post Offices have extended facilities such as telephone/fax services and some also provide currency exchange services. Stamps can also be bought at hotels, tobacconists and souvenir shops.

Religion There is no official religion, but the vast majority of the population (90%) is Roman Catholic.

Shopping Most shops are open 9.00 a.m. to 1.00 p.m. and 4.30 p.m. to 8.00 p.m. Monday to Saturday. However, most commercial stores and malls stay open from 10.00 a.m. to 10.00 p.m.

In Spain, the shopper can find items of high quality at a fair price. Spanish leather goods are prized throughout the world, offering high-fashion originals at reasonable prices. Of note are the suede coats and jackets. In general, leather goods combine excellent craftsmanship with high-quality design. The numerous excellent sheries, wines and spirits produced in Spain also make good souvenirs to take home.

Time Zone Based on European Daylight Saving, April to October.

New York 6.00 a.m.
London 11.00 a.m.
Madrid 12 noon
Sydney 8.00 p.m.
Auckland 10.00 p.m.

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GEOGRAPHY

Spain shares the Iberian peninsula with Portugal and is bounded to the north by the Pyrenees, which separate Spain from France. The Balearic Islands in the Mediterranean and the Canary Islands off the west coast of Africa are part of Spain, as are the tiny enclaves of Ceuta and Melilla on the north African mainland. With the exception of Switzerland, mainland Spain is the highest and most mountainous country in Europe, with an average elevation of 610m.

AT A GLANCE

Spain is a constitutional monarchy with the Head of State reigning King Juan Carlos I (since 1975).

Capital: Madrid

Population: 39 million

Land Area: 504 782km²

Ave. Temp.: January 5°C, July 24°C.

Annual Rainfall: 439mm

Currency: Euro

Language: Spanish

Major Exports: textiles and apparel, metals, chemicals.

Primary Trading Partners: EU Countries.